



CARE LEAVERS AUSTRALASIA NETWORK

CLAN is a National, Independent, Peak Membership Body which supports, represents and advocates for people who were raised in Australian Orphanages, Children's Homes, Foster Care & Other Institutions.

February 2018

Inquiry into the Quality of Care in Residential Aged Care
Facilities in Australia

*"I will never live in 'Care' again,
I am afraid I will be re-abused!"*

-Anonymous

CLAN's 2011 Survey "Struggling to keep it together"

CLAN - Care Leavers Australasia Network is the national, independent, peak membership body which represents and advocates for Care Leavers who were raised in Australia's and New Zealand's Orphanages, Children's Homes, other Institutions and Foster Care. The Senate Inquiry estimates there were more than 500 000 children in Australia who grew up in 900 plus orphanages, children's homes, training schools, institutions and foster care. CLAN's main objective is to assist and support Care Leavers and their families through the wide variety of work we do including, but not limited to, advocacy for a National Redress Scheme, support at the Royal Commission, the Senate Inquiry, searching for family, counselling, casework, records, and publishing Care Leaver's stories in the national newsletter.

CLAN would like to thank the Senate Inquiry for giving us the opportunity to provide our input and recommendations regarding the 'Inquiry into the Quality of Care in Residential Aged Care Facilities in Australia'.

CLAN has a strong position on supporting and understanding Care Leavers who are faced with the undesirable decision of being placed back in to an institutionalised setting of a Nursing, or Aged Care Home. For the majority, this concept is petrifying as they began their lives surrounded by abuse in Orphanages, Children's Homes, Training Schools, Missions and Foster Care.

Care Leavers greatest fear is finishing their lives the same way as their childhood. There must be the uttermost importance placed upon treatment and understanding of Care Leavers experiences whilst transitioning them into Aged Care, and must be maintained whilst they remain there.

Firstly, CLAN feels that the vital way in which we can be certain Care Leavers histories of abuse and neglect in institutionalised settings can be respected and understood; is through detailed and adequate training. For Care Leavers, the daunting idea of *again* putting their 'care' and lives in to the hand of an organisation is overwhelmingly frightening.

A 2011 survey conducted by CLAN on it's members, "*Struggling to keep it together*", found that 79% of respondents claimed the choice of a nursing home would be their absolute last option. Only 1% of CLAN members said they would like to finish their lives in a nursing home.

"I truly fear ending my life how it started"

"I would rather be dead"

This clearly outlines the fear associated with Care Leavers thoughts of re-institutionalisation. Again we draw attention to the significance of educating those who work in Aged Care facilities on the terror that Care Leavers experience with the idea of being placed in another Home. As a Care Leavers greatest fear in life, is being re-abused.

CLAN strongly advocates for a Care Leaver, trauma-informed training approach to be provided to ALL workers within Aged Care. Within the terms of reference of this Inquiry, we also see it vital that the Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport implement this training as compulsory for ALL that are working in this sector. Furthermore, we also encourage the workers of:

- The Australian Aged Care Quality Agency,
- The Aged Care Complaints Commission and,
- Charter of Care Recipients Rights and Responsibility,

to be informed and educated on Care Leaver histories to ensure the purpose and desired outcomes of this enquiry is effectively met - ensuring adequate consumer protection in Aged Care.

As a part of this training, CLAN sees it as crucial that Aged Care facilities guarantee Care Leavers needs are respected, heard, and understood because in their childhoods they were so very often neglected and given no voice.

Additionally, a major trigger for Care Leavers is the name of the Nursing Homes. Some Nursing Homes have the SAME names as the Orphanages that Care Leavers were once in e.g. St Joseph's, Roslyn Hall and St Catherine's, to name a few examples.

We face the issue of many Nursing Homes being run by the same Churches and Charities that once abused Care Leavers in their childhood. It creates an enormous amount of anxiety and anger for Care Leavers if they are put in a Nursing Homes with the same name as their Orphanage. CLAN wants the Churches and Charities who run these Aged Care facilities to be more understanding, aware, empathetic and sensitive and make urgent changes to these names. We question if these organisations have learnt or taken notice of the Royal Commission. Over 43% of the evidence given at the Royal Commission was from Care Leavers. For Care Leavers the association to childhood experiences with Nursing Homes is incredibly distressing.

“I do not want to be put in a Home! If I had to go in a Home, I will take an overdose and no one will stop me” – Bev 80.

It is vital staff are informed of Care Leaver histories and the Royal Commission, and trained upon these issues to avoid re-traumatisation.

Furthermore, Care Leaver training should be extended as optional for friends, relatives or support people who are paid a Carers Allowance. Training should be conducted by groups, such as CLAN who hold lived-in experiences of a childhood in “Care” and have worked with Care Leavers for over 17 years. It is essential that those with a comprehensive understanding of the issues that arise from Care Leaver experiences deliver this education and training. Those working with Care Leavers need to understand:

- Fear of working with authority figures
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – potential triggers and flashbacks
- Fear of punishment for incontinence (many Care Leavers were punished for bedwetting as children)
- Anxiety
- Importance of keeping their possessions safe (many had very little possessions as children)
- Understanding of food requirements and fussier eaters (many Care Leavers were malnourished, forced to eat rotten food, or force fed their own vomit)
- Petrified of being handled by strangers and dressed (due to an extensive history of sexual abuse, humiliation and physical beatings)
- Hesitation for medical examinations (violations of their bodies as children)
- Depression surrounding yearly events such as Birthdays, Christmas, Mothers and Father day (many Care Leavers were not allowed to celebrate these in the Homes nor did they enjoy them in adulthood)

Most importantly, it must be understood that Care Leavers have grave fears of being neglected or re-abused psychologically, sexually, physically and emotionally.

CLAN also feels that it is essential that current services such as the NDIS are effective and beneficial for Care Leavers. For many, the use of Aged Care facilities can be avoided if they receive adequate home supports. The longer we can support Care Leavers in their homes, where they feel safe, the better the outcome.

In a recent 2016 CLAN Survey “***My family only knows what I want them to know***” it was stated that 54 of 517 respondents felt going in to Aged Care was their greatest fear in life.

Especially following recent media coverage, where nursing homes are projected as unsafe and uncaring environments, where abuse occurs and residents are taken advantage of.

In 2011 a Central Coast Nursing Home, William Cape Gardens, deprived a dying man of food and photographed his genitals. One of the suspended nurses was even reinstated. For many Care Leavers, this story among many others is extremely terrifying as it reshapes the abuse and neglect they suffered in the Care system.

For this reason the importance of home care supports provides peace of mind for Care Leavers who are getting older, sicker, and less capable of caring for themselves solely.

“I would like to see a push for services to help the Aged to stay independently living in their own homes”

“I would rather be on the streets than in a Nursing Home!”

The above responses are from CLAN’s 2016 Members survey.

Elder abuse often goes unreported. Similar to the experiences that Care Leavers as children suffered, they try to speak up and are not acknowledged, or are incapable of doing so. For Care Leavers, this raises the concern that they will be again silenced in their experiences, and go unnoticed. While there are no definite numbers, The World Health Organisation (2015) has estimated prevalence rates of elder abuse to range between 2% - 14%. Many Care Leavers feel they cannot trust the government or any other organisations run by churches or charities due to past experiences.

“I hate getting old, and I would hate to be put in a Home again, because I have worked in Nursing Homes for 30 years, and I’ve seen so much abuse” – Yvonne NSW

Following this, we find it imperative that similar to the need for children in Care in today’s society, Aged Care residents must have an independent Aged Care advocate. It is important Care Leavers are educated on their rights and provided information about various support systems and organisations that can support them. Furthermore, the advocate could routinely visit elderly Care Leavers, to assess their condition in Aged Care homes, and advocate for their needs. Particularly this is vital for those with disabilities and those with sensory or cognitive impairments. Unannounced visits by an external advocate is likely to deter or detect any mistreatment or neglect.

The concept of being re-institutionalised petrifies Care Leavers, so as a country who failed them in their childhoods, we must not allow the cycle of abuse and neglect to be repeated. Adequate support, training and education will assist those working with Care Leavers to understand their complexities, and potentially alleviate some of the distress and anxiety that Care Leavers hold about entering Aged Care. Additionally, by providing Care Leavers with an Aged Care advocate, we can be sure an external support can assist them with any needs or concerns.

CLAN thanks the Senate Inquiry for reading our submission. We wish to see our recommendations implemented in to the Aged Care System, to ensure Care Leavers feel safe, confident and comfortable in their final years.

References

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CLAN, 2011. *Struggling to Keep it Together*, CLAN's Survey Report

CLAN, 2016. *My Family Only Knows What I want them to know*, CLAN's Survey Report.

Royal Commission (2017) *Final Report Recommendations*, Commonwealth of Australia

Please see attached CLANS paper presented at the Elder Abuse Conference in Perth in 2014.